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ABSTRACT

Much of the research on interracial student interaction has been conducted in schools during the first years of forced desegregation, the data thus often reflecting tension laden situations. Another methodological problem with these studies is that sex differences have been analyzed only by comparing interactions among girls to those among boys, rather than examining cross-sex interactions. The study described in this paper sought to rectify these shortcomings by examining interaction patterns among 457 black, white and Hispanic elementary school children. The subjects were all from an urban, lower middle class, racially mixed area whose schools had been peacefully desegregated since before the oldest children in the sample (fifth graders) started school. Based on the data collected, it appears that girls and boys have different patterns of race and sex interactions. In addition, it appears that there is far more isolation in the elementary years by sex than by race. Children interact less with different sex children and these interactions are more likely to be negative. The relatively large amount of same sex interracial interaction may indicate that conclusions from studies conducted in recently desegregated schools should not be generalized to more stable settings. (Author/GC)

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Student Interaction: The Importance of Race and Sex

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Over twenty-five years ago, the landmark case of Brown vs Board of Education declared "separate but equal" education to be unconstitutional. While fully integrated education did not come about because of this decision, much research on interracial student interaction did. The work done in this area was valuable, but had several serious methodological problems. Many of the studies were done under the first years of forced desegregation where emotions and tensions ran high. Too, the studies frequently did not test for sex differences. If sex differences were analyzed, it was by comparing the interactions among girls to those among boys rather than examining cross sex interactions.

This study sought to rectify some of the lacks of previous studies by studying the interaction patterns of a sample of 457 students in a peacefully desegregated school setting.

From the data, it appears that girls and boys may have different patterns of race and sex interactions and failure to take these differences into account may cause erroneous conclusions to be drawn from work on interracial interaction. Too, it appears that, at least in this study, there is far more isolation in the elementary years by sex than by race. Children interact less with different sex children and those interactions are more likely to be negative. The relatively large amount of interracial interaction (most of which was same sex) may indicate that conclusions from studies done in the past or done over recently desegregated schools should not be generalized to more stable settings.

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Over twenty-five years ago, the landmark case of Brown vs Board of Education declared "separate but equal" education to be unconstitutional. While fully integrated education did not come about because of this decision, much research on interacial student interaction did. The work done in this area was valuable, but had several serious methodological problems. Many of the studies were done under the first years of forced desegregation where emotions and tensions ran high. The interactions found under those circumstances most likely did not reflect patterns of interaction in more "normal" situations. Too, the studies frequently did not test for sex differences. If sex differences were analyzed, it was by comparing the interactions among girls to those among boys rather than examining cross sex interactions.

When the studies did examine sex differences, they found that in general, boys had more interracial interaction than girls. Gordon (1965) found much more interracial contact among boys than girls, while Hall and Cantey (1969) found black boys interacted more with white boys than black girls with white girls. Schofield and Sanger (1977) found girls more apt to stay in same race groups than boys and Gordon (1965) and Lipton (1965) found more hostile incidents between black and white girls than black and white boys. Only Singer (reported in Weinberg, 1977) found girls to be less predjudiced than boys.

When cross sex, cross race interactions are analyzed, less consistency is found. Davidson (1978) found that when students were asked to pair two pictures in a three picture set, they were more apt to make pairs of children of the same race than children of the same sex. Students felt that similarity in race, rather than sex was the more important factor. Krenkel (1979), on the other hand, found that fourth, fifth, and sixth graders in San Francisco were more apt to interaction with children of different races than of a different sex.

Since sex differences have been found, it is somewhat surprizing that from 1939 to 1979, major studies of student interracial interaction have been conducted without sex breakdowns or analysis of race and sex interaction (Creswell, reported in Weinberg, 1977; Slovin and Madden, 1979). Possibly the sensitivity about interracial romantic liaisons and the wide spread white fear of racial and inter-marriage during the first years of desegregation (Weinberg, 1977) contributed the refusal to examine cross sex, cross race interaction.

Procedures: This study sought to rectify some of the lacks of earlier studies by studying the interaction patterns of a sample of 457 Black, Anglo and Hispanic elementary school aged girls and boys. The subjects were all from an urban, lower middle class, racially mixed area whose schools have been peacefully desegregated since before the oldest children in the sample (fifth graders) started school. Table 1 provides a breakdown of the sample by sex and ethnic group.

Table 1

SUBJECT SEX AND ETHNIC GROUP BREAKDOWN

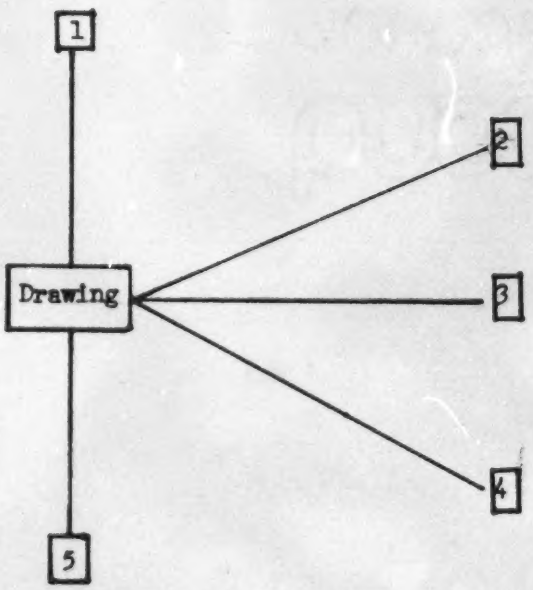
	Black	White	Other
Female	82/18%	114/25%	27/56%
Male	82/18%	133/29%	19/4%

In order to test the amount of interracial and female/male interaction within the sample group, a number of measures were used. The first measure was a two-part social distance scale. Based on the Racial and Cultural Expressions test (Samph and Campbell, 1972), the social distance scale measured subject perceptions of both power and distance. Figure A indicates the formats that were used to measure power and distance.

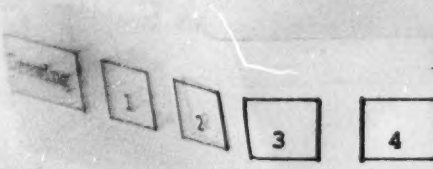
Figure A

Formats of Scales Used in Social Distance Scale

Power Scale



Distance Scale



Part 1 of the two part scale included distance scales for drawings of black and white females and power scales for drawings of black and white males. Part 2 had power scales for the female drawings and distance scales for the males. Drawings were used to minimize the effect extranious variables such as weight, eye glasses, and expression might have on the subject's perceptions. The four drawings (Black and White, female and male) were all done by the same artist and were found by a panel of three educators to be similar in expression and degree of attractiveness.

The instrument included no written directions. Oral directions indicated that subjects should pretend the drawing was a new student in their school and to choose one of the boxes to stand for subject and put an "X" in that box. During the administration of the questionnaires no students appeared to have difficulty understanding the directions or filling out the questionnaire.

Two other measures were also used in the study. The first was a student interaction form. This observation form measured the amount and type of interaction students had with other students of the same and different sex and race. The third measure, the informal grouping pattern form, was developed to measure the sex and race breakdown of voluntarily formed student groups.

All of these measures were given to the subjects in October of 1978. The social distance scales were given by four resource teachers, while the observations were made in all but one class, by the supervisor of the resource teachers. The one class was observed by an aide.

The social distance scales were given to the subjects during classtime. Half of the classes received part 1 first, the other half part 2. The other part of the scale was given two days after the first. Within two weeks of

the administration of the social distance scale, students in eleven classes were asked during class time to form small groups to do a classroom task. The observers noted the race and sex makeup of each group.

During the same two-week period, from each of eleven classes, a sample of six students (racially and sex mixed) was selected by the resource teacher and observed by the supervisor of the resource teachers. During the twenty minute observation periods, the amounts and types of interaction each student had with other students of the same and different race and sex was noted. In order to preserve confidentiality the social distance scales were anonymous and the observations were done by people who did not know the names of the students they were observing. This method was necessary in order to secure the cooperation of the school district, however it did mean that it was not possible to "match" the parts 1 and 2 of individual student's scores on the social distance scales or to correlate individual responses to individual observation results. This lack of matching meant that the data analysis used had to be primarily descriptive.

Analysis: Since race and sex interaction was being studied, the responses were broken into four groups; responses to pictures (or students) of the same sex, same race (SSSR); responses to the same sex different race (SSDR); different sex same race (DSSR) and different sex different race (DSDR).

Table 2 gives a summary of responses to the power scale.

Table 2

Perceptions of Individual Power in Relation
to Students of the Same and Different Sex and Race

N/Percent

FEMALE SUBJECTS	1 Superior	2 Slightly Superior	3 Equal	4 Slightly Inferior	5 Inferior
Same Sex Same Race	35/17.1%	24/11.7%	103/50%	17/8.3%	26/12.7%
Same Sex Different Race	18/8.7%	47/22.8%	85/41.3%	30/14.6%	26/12.6%
Different Sex Same Race	25/13.4%	48/25.8%	48/25.8%	39/21%	26/14%
Different Sex Different Race	27/14.6%	54/29.2%	33/17.8%	50/27%	21/11.4%

MALE SUBJECTS	1	2	3	4	5
Same Sex Same Race	32/17.8%	37/17.4%	84/39.4%	25/11.7%	29/13.6%
Same Sex Different Race	38/18%	29/13.7%	81/38.4%	35/16.6%	28/13.3%
Different Sex Same Race	31/14.4%	41/19%	76/35.2%	32/14.8%	36/16.7%
Different Sex Different Race	41/19%	52/24.1%	45/20.8%	56/25.9%	22/10.2%

Chi squares were done comparing female to male responses on the four groups. (SSSR, χ^2=6.366; SSDR, χ^2=13.05; DSSR, χ^2=7.6; DSDR, χ^2=2.72). Only in response to students of the same sex different race, was the response of the male and female subjects significantly different ($p<.05$). As might be expected for both sexes, the highest percent of subjects felt equal to

same sex, same race drawings and the lowest percent felt equal to different sex, different race drawings. Girls seemed to evidence the most change in feelings of equity with over half feeling equal to the drawing of a same race girl and less than one-fifth feeling equal to the drawing of a different race boy. Girls also appeared to have more equitable feelings about girls regardless of race (SSSR, 50%; SSDR, 41.3%) than about boys (DSSR, 25.8%; DSDR, 17.8%). Boys appear to have no similar pattern

These differences were also found in the distance scales. As Table 3 indicates, males and females felt closest to same sex, same race drawings and felt most distant from different sex, different race drawings. However, again girls seem to have more range in their feelings than boys (female distance scores range from 1.63 to 2.90 while male scores range from 1.97 to 2.68) and appear to feel close to girls regardless of race (SSSR, 1.63; SSDR, 1.98) than to boys (DSSR, 2.66; DSDR, 2.90). Boys appear to have no similar pattern.

Table 3

Mean Distance Scores of Subjects in Relation to Students of the Same and Different Sex and Race

(1=closest; 4=most distant)

Female Subjects	Same Race	Different Race
Same Sex	1.63	1.98
Different Sex	2.66	2.90

Male Subjects	Same Race	Different Race
Same Sex	1.97	2.24
Different Sex	2.28	2.68

The results of observation of the subjects were not dissimilar to the results of the social distance scale. As Table 4 indicates when subjects were asked to form small (4-6) groups to do a classroom task, a majority of the subjects formed themselves into same sex groups (78.3%). An even higher majority (86%) formed themselves into groups that were integrated by race.

Table 4

Percentages of Subjects Forming Groups Integrated by Sex and/or Race

N/Percent

No Integration	Race Integration	Sex Integration	Race & Sex Integration
35/14%	160/64.3%	0/0%	54/21.7%

Based on this set of observations, there appears to be much more race than sex interaction among the students.

Sex also appears to influence individual student interactions. As Table 5 indicates, the same sex interactions differ from different sex interactions in both quality and quantity.

Table 5

Numbers of Interaction of Same Sex, Different Sex;

Same Race, Different Race Subjects

N/Percent

	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Total Interactions
Same Sex Same Race	80/77.7%	13/12.6%	10/9.7%	103
Same Sex Different Race	111/79.3%	18/12.9%	11/7.9%	140
Different Sex Same Race	23/35.4%	29/44.6%	13/20%	65
Different Sex Different Race	28/35.4%	17/21.5%	34/43%	79

Same sex interactions are both more numerous and proportionately more positive than different sex interactions. A majority of the interactions (62.8%) were subjects of the same sex and of these interactions 78.6% were positive. Only 37.2% of the interactions were between different sex subjects and of these only 35.4% were positive. A similar pattern does not occur when the interactions are examined by the race of the subjects. More interaction was found between different race subjects (56.6%) than between same race subjects (43.4%), while similar proportions of both the different race (63.5%) and same race (61.3%) interactions are positive. Results are similar to those found earlier.

The preceding results are far from conclusive. Data from one school district using social distance techniques supported by sample observations is certainly not generalizable to other populations, but the results do pose some ideas that require further investigation.

It appears that girls and boys may have different patterns of race and sex interactions and failure to take these differences into account may cause erroneous conclusions to be drawn from work on interracial interaction. Too, it appears that, at least in this study, there is far more isolation in the elementary years by sex than by race. Children interact less with different sex children and those interactions are more likely to be negative. The relatively large amount of interracial interaction (most of which was same sex) may indicate that conclusions from studies done in the past or done over recently desegregated schools should not be generalized to more stable settings.

In recent years, there has been much concern with racial isolation in desegrated schools, but very little with sex isolation. There is some

indication that race is becoming less of an influence than sex on interaction. Of course this finding has little relevance to the large number of schools throughout the country, which are still race segregated, however, it appears that emphasis needs to be placed on encouraging cross sex as well as cross race interaction if schools are going to be effective teachers of equity.

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